If television content evolves in relation to its social, political and economic frame, then the diachronic study of a television genre should contribute to bring into light the specific characteristics and changes that mark a given society through time. Within this scope, the present contribution proposes to retrace the evolution of Greek television drama over the last three decades, in order to demonstrate how this type of program has developed different contents embedded in the immediate circumstances of the local context of production.

The first part of our presentation will thus focus on the years of the State monopoly (1970-1989) in order to reveal how the genre of fiction of this period has functioned as an ideological medium of state propaganda, reproducing the discourse of its government-controlled broadcasters: an entertainment fiction combined with military propaganda, as to fit the Dictatorship’s ideological project and promote its values; a historical fiction based on some of the most famous literature works of the Hellenic cultural patrimony, as to stimulate the nation's collective memory by evoking its cultural roots, for the conservative government of New Democracy; and, finally, a “pedagogical” and “engaged” fiction of political content, for the socialist government of PASOK. These elements are of vital importance in order to understand the constant dependence of Greek television drama upon its broadcasters’ short term interests and its incapacity to develop into an autonomous language of expression.

The second part of our presentation will discuss the changes introduced in the television discourse by the entry of private television in Greece and, in particular, the “return” to an entertainment and “light-theme” fiction with the expansion of comedies, henceforth termed as “sitcoms”, the return to adventure and crime drama, as well as the development of a new sub-genre, the soap opera. We will particularly focus on the standardisation of production, often mentioned as one of the main drawbacks of contemporary television drama along with the degradation of content and the expansion of sensationalism. Our goal will be to incite a reflection upon the role of today’s mercantile television policies in the materialistic and consumer-oriented lifestyle that seems to expand in contemporary Greece.

This contribution is based on a PhD research undertaken over the period 1995-1999 at the University Paris III – Sorbonne Nouvelle, under the direction of Professor Michaël Palmer. The study is based on an analysis of a sample of fiction programs (701 episodes emanating from “the same” week per year, starting from 1970 up to 1997) combined with 42 interviews...
with professionals of Greek television\(^1\) (Koukoutsaki, 2003, 2001). Our reflection joins the ongoing discussion about the relationship between television discourse and society, as it has been developed by researchers like Philippe Breton, Serge Proulx and Armand Mattelart.

Both of the terms “drama” and “fiction” are abundantly used today in different contexts, from television news (Buonanno, 1993: 177-202) to theatre or literature, and there isn’t a clear and common definition for either of them. However, for the purpose of this study, “drama” and “fiction” are used as synonyms in order to qualify screenplay-based television programs structured in more than two episodes, produced in Greek by Greek companies and screened on Greek television channels.

1. Greek television drama during the years of the State monopoly

The years of the military dictatorship

Television broadcasting in Greece began officially in 1966. The first Greek fiction program was screened four years later in 1970 (“The house with the palm tree”, “to spiti me to finika” in Greek, broadcast on the military channel YENED for 13 episodes, each lasting 30 minutes\(^2\)). These dates are of great significance because from 1967 to 1974 Greece was governed by a military dictatorship. It comes as no surprise to find out that, from its very first steps, the new-born medium of television was taken under the dictators' direct control. Actually, one of the two national stations, YENED, was explicitly a politico-military organisation that depended on the Ministry of National Defence. This phenomenon, unique in the history of European television (ERG, 1986: 3, 47), turned out to be fatal for Greek television production, in general, as well as for television drama production, in particular: from its very beginning, the latter was conditioned to fit the necessities and the purposes of the military regime.

In this context and for obvious reasons, television production was undertaken by the national television channels (EIRT, YENED). As far as television drama is concerned, three production models can be found:

a. The subcontracted production: The major part of national drama production was assigned to subcontracting companies which were working under the dictators’ control. These companies had roughly the role of an executive producer. They would undertake the realisation of a program commanded by a channel and would then be reimbursed for it by the latter. Information about the production companies of this period (Georgiadis, 1980: 79-83), demonstrates that they were rarely specialised in television drama but developed, on the contrary, a wide range of parallel activities, such as the import of foreign programs, the production of TV games, advertising spots, films, plays, etc. In fact, a large part of them only produced one fiction throughout this

\(^1\) It is fairly common in Greece that television professionals assure simultaneously several functions within the audio-visual system (direction, screenplay writing, consulting, etc.). The lack of specialisation is one of the main drawbacks in Greek television. Given this fact, the interviews on which this study was based can be more or less classified as follows: 16 interviews with Television Executives that are (or were) directly or indirectly implied in drama production and broadcasting; 11 interviews with Executives in various recently founded organisations dealing with television (The National Council of Radio and Television, AGB Hellas, the Greek company specialised in television audience ratings, etc.); 10 interviews with creators (directors and/or screenplay writers); 4 interviews with Scholars and Consultants on Greek media; 1 interview with a Journalist-Critic of television programs.

\(^2\) The relatively high number of episodes is a general feature of Greek television drama. Similar remarks observed on Egyptian television seem to encourage the hypothesis of this being a particular characteristic of a Mediterranean or oriental model of television production (El Emary, 1995:174).
period. Production companies were created and run by TV writers, directors, actors, advertisers or entrepreneurs, who had acquired some experience in the Greek commercial cinema of the 60s or had studied television abroad. Some of them had family ties with members of the dictatorship. Personal relations played, consequently, a major role in the decision making process.

b. The barter: At times, the “barter”, an American model of production based on exchanging programs for advertising space, was applied. According to this formula, television channels received, with no previous expense on their behalf, hours of programs in which a producer or a distributor had inserted advertising spots that he had negotiated with the advertisers.

c. The in-house or internal production: Only a small part of television drama was produced directly by the stations. The cost of these programs was extremely low compared to “external” productions. Nevertheless, the channels were not sufficiently equipped to sustain this model, hence the limited use of it.

Dictators saw in television a means to expand their propaganda. YENED, the military channel, had an explicit order to “psychologically prepare the Nation for a possible outbreak of war and to reinforce its morale and spirit during battle” (Kastoras, 1978: 93). Within this scope, programs needed to be entertaining and “neutral”, so as to encourage a passive attitude, allaying thus every historical or social conscience and preventing any critical reactions on behalf of the audiences. The values promoted were those of the dictatorship’s dogma: “Nation, Religion, Family”. To this respect, censorship was constantly exerted throughout the process of production. In the absence of any specific legislative frame codifying the modalities of intervention, it was on the basis of the censor’s judgement that censorship was exerted. As far as the nature of interventions was concerned, it was basically political. Concepts like communism were strictly forbidden to be cited or implied within the screenplay. However, prohibitions concerned other domains as well: morale, religion, aesthetics, or even advertising. Michalis Papanikolaou, director and screenwriter, recalls that one of its scenarios was qualified as “anti-national, anti-Hellenic and pornographic”, because it presented the “portrait of a woman dreaming of a sexual life that she couldn’t have” (Papanikolaou, 1996). The control of screenplays depended on the General Secretary of Press and Information but the dictators’ censorship extended to all levels of production. The censor’s presence during shooting, especially regarding satiric programs, had major consequences, since even a small remark on his behalf was enough to force the director to interrupt shooting and start everything from the beginning. Moreover, inquiring on the political activities of the participants (actors, screenwriters, directors, etc.), as well as supervising the final editing of the programs, constituted additional forms of the dictatorship’s control on production.

In this frame and in the absence of any organisation for the screenwriters’ defence, the latter were obliged to practice self-censorship. Democracy, equality, workers’ rights and class issues were among the themes to avoid. All critical or satirical reaction against Government was also forbidden (the comedy “Him and him”, “Ekeinos ki ekeinos” in Greek, 103 episodes of 15 minutes, EIRT, 1972-1973, seems to be one of the very rare exceptions where satire insinuations against the regime managed to escape the censors’ control). Sometimes, the only option for the writer was silence. If today we can study in retrospective the television production of the dictatorship era, the knowledge of the non-materialised ideas or that of the works that disappeared because of fear, is lost for ever (it is important to add, at this point, that over this period a part of the Greek intelligentsia had chosen to live in exile and was thus excluded from television and artistic production in general).

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3 It is Procter & Gamble that invented barter in the 30s (Mattelart, 1990: 76-77).
Contrary to the dictatorship’s political project based on the coercion and police control of Greek society, its symbolic project had recourse to the mercantile devices of mass culture, “formal products of an economic liberalism without State, as well as of a State control underlain by the ideology of national security” (Mattelart, 1987: 33-34). Consequently, entertainment genres such as fiction perfectly fitted the dictatorship's ideological project. Indeed, the production of Greek television drama blossomed over this period. Its global output in terms of quantity underwent a considerable rise, especially in 1973, when the total weekly broadcast time of domestic fiction reached approximately 18 hours (on both channels). Comedies and adventure drama were among the privileged genres of national production, occupying more than half of the global output. Aside from their entertaining character, adventure and crime fictions had a complementary function, trace of the dictatorship’s censorship and propaganda. Detective stories in their majority, based on original screenplays, they served to highlight the role and the importance of the National Police Force as well as policemen's devotion to the Law. Indeed, the iconography of the characters reproduced several stereotypes and myths regarding the representation of policemen on the screen (Rodier, 1994: 14). Of modest social origins and middle social status, they had a symbolic role as they were supposed to personify the dictatorship’s values. The existence of a production company within the Hellenic Police Public Relations Department is therefore significant (Georgiadis, 1980: 447). General dramas were also important. Actually, a closer examination of this category in terms of content brings into light the existence of a large number of “war fictions” abundantly developing the theme of the Greek resistance to the German army during the Second World War. The significance of these programs within the context of the Dictatorship is therefore apparent: ideological products of military propaganda, they were aimed at the nation's conciliation with the army. “The unknown war” ("O agnostos polemos", in Greek), detective drama written and directed by Nikos Foskolos and broadcast on YENED over the period 1971-1974 (226 episodes of 45 minutes), is often cited as the most representative example of this category.

The years of the independent (?) State television

The end of the military dictatorship brought a general optimism and installed a solid confidence regarding the country’s future. During the years after the dictatorship, both national stations continued to be government-controlled, first by the conservative party New Democracy ("Nea Dimokratia" in Greek), which was in power from 1975 to 1981, and then by the socialist PASOK, which ruled the country up until 1989. The television boards were appointed by the government and each time the latter had to change, the former would change, too. Within this context, the role of broadcasters in the procedure of production was consolidated as well. It is important to mention that, contrary to most European States, which openly sustained independent production during the 80s, Greek television of this period further reinforced the in-house, government-controlled model.

During the second half of the 1970s up until 1981, the global output of domestic fiction programs remained high (approximately 12 hours per week on both channels). The technical
conditions of production made remarkable progress due to the arrival of new equipment that enabled outdoor video shootings, better sound recording and easier editing. Moreover, the first programs in colour, screened at the end of the 70s, stimulated the producers' interest as well as the public's enthusiasm. However, contrary to the previous variety in terms of genres, this period was characterised by the abundance of general drama. Information existing on these programs has revealed that most of them were not original scenarios, but adaptations of some of the most famous social and historical works of literature stemming from the Hellenic cultural patrimony (“Christ re-crucified”, “Ο Χριστος Χανασταβρόνετε” in Greek, EIRT/ERT, 1975-1976, 50 episodes of 45 minutes, adaptation of a Nikos Kazantzakis’s novel, is one of the pioneers of this type of programs\(^8\)). This return to the classics can be viewed on two levels: first of all, it demonstrates the lack of ideas and original screenplays and reveals the effort to improve television programs quality by reducing the number of the up-to-then melodramas that were mostly based on dialogues and speech and had few outdoor shootings; secondly, it brings into light the policy that guided the television production of this period. Situated at the crossroads of a financial logic and a symbolic project, it had a double aim: the establishment of a national industry in terms of television production, as well as the stimulation of the nation's collective memory\(^9\) by evoking its cultural roots. Most of these programs met a considerable success, something that proves, according to some analysts, the potential conciliation between literature and television (Sarris, 1992: 213). However, the considerable alteration of History in which they often resulted, voluntary or not, was firmly condemned by the intellectual circles (Kastoras, 1978: 264, Manthoulis, 1981: 112).

Indeed, some of the productions of this period, productions “where history was treated […] the legendary logic outweighing the historical one” (Lemaire, 1989: 207-208), outpace the intentions of their authors and reveal the ideological preoccupations of the Hellenic society and its effort to understand its past and define its national identity. Doxiadis’ comparative study between a specific television drama production of this period (“The teacher with the golden eyes”, “i daskala me ta xrussa matia” in Greek, ERT, 1979, 14 episodes of 50 minutes) and the original novel from which it emanated (by Stratis Myrivilis) reveals evidence of the ideological interference in the literary text (Doxiadis, 1993). This study shows how television production put forward the socio-political frame of the story to the detriment of the naturalistic and liberal spirit that characterises the novel. The thoughts and emotions of the main character were given a “collective” tone that is not found in the book. The most representative example of these interventions is an excerpt of the dialogue between the basic character (called Vranas) and a Turk soldier:

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“Vranas: And what about the foreign forces that led us to this adventure?
Turk soldier: Let them kill each other, eat each other, pigs! Why should we care about them?
Vranas: You’re right! Why shed our blood for foreign interests?”
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This part of the dialogue doesn’t exist in the novel and provides proof of an ideological interference in the literary text, aimed at putting forward a “progressive” and “anti-imperialistic” nationalism, associated with the eternal mourning about the loss of the “glorious and independent” Greece, caused by the intervention of the “Big Forces”\(^10\).

The year 1982 marked a radical decline in the evolution of Greek television drama output. From this point up until 1989, it maintained a considerably low level (approximately five

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\(^8\) It also constitutes the first television drama outdoor production.

\(^9\) Similar functions seem to have assured the historic television fictions in Quebec (Lemaire, 1989: 207-208).

\(^10\) It must also be noted at this point that the representation of Turks in Greek television productions of this period often posed problems to the adapters of historic literary texts (Manthoulis, 1981:131).
hours per week on both channels, at times less\(^{11}\). This rupture with the past needs to be examined, firstly, on the basis of the global financial penury of television production throughout this period (IIC, 1988: 127; Kopp, 1990: 127), and, secondly, in combination with the new government's position towards television in general (Papathanassopoulos, 1990). For the socialist party \textit{PASOK}, television was an ideological medium with a pedagogical mission\(^{12}\) and, consequently, the production of entertaining fiction programs was of minor importance. The consequences of this policy were equally obvious in the genre's diversification. General drama predominated throughout this period, mostly composed of contemporary social fictions that developed three basic themes, “socialism, provinces, women” – often productions of director and screenwriter Yiorgos Michailidis (Valoukos, 1998: 31). In the same time, the first commentaries on the military dictatorship and Greek politics appeared, reflecting the ideological orientation of government-controlled television over this period. Some representative examples are the following: “The beginning of the fire - Rokkos Choïdas”, “\textit{To xekinima tis fotias – Rokkos Choïdas}” in Greek, ERT1, 1982-1983, 12 episodes of 45 minutes, “Ancient rust”, “\textit{Archaia skouria}” in Greek, ERT2, 1983, 18 episodes of 45 minutes, “Anna X”, ERT 1, 1985, 13 episodes of 45 minutes.

It comes therefore as a conclusion that during the years of the State monopoly (1970-89), the production trends of Greek television drama reflected the political interests of its state-controlled producers/broadcasters. The latter interfered directly or indirectly in production by regulating the market, by imposing specific types of programs, by authorising or not specific contents. Mirroring the government's specific ideology, Greek television drama of this period confirms that every television represents “not only a people's culture, its customs and its language, but also the point of view of the political system in effect in a specific country” (Cazeneuve, 1974: 46).

2. The Greek television drama of the 90s

In 1987, Greek state channels, called henceforth “public”, became legally “autonomous”. Two years later, in 1989, the monopoly of public television was abolished in Greece and the first two private stations, Mega Channel and Antenna TV, appeared without legal permission. The deregulation of Greek television has to be seen as a logical consequence of the general European television liberalisation of the 80s. Nevertheless, the disorder in which the former took place was largely attributed to the turbulent context of political rivalry between the two aforementioned major Greek parties, the socialist party \textit{PASOK} and its conservative opposition party \textit{New Democracy}, in the imminence of the national elections of 1989. The precipitated creation of a third public channel (ET3) by \textit{PASOK}'s government in 1988 can be viewed in the same scope (Papathanassopoulos, 1993, 1997). The television landscape of the 90s was characterised by a two-pole oligopoly, in which two private channels, Antenna TV and Mega Channel, dominated the market. Several other private stations did exist but their audience ratings were of minor importance\(^{13}\). Since 1993, however, certain stations, mainly Sky TV and, to a lesser extent, Star Channel and New Channel, progressively managed to consolidate their place on the market. Contrary to many European States (Ferrell Lowe and Alm, 1997), Greek public television was not able to keep up with the evolution of the sector and seemed, up until recently, to have been phased out.

\(^{11}\) On an average weekly broadcast time of approximately 125 hours (on both channels) over this period (1982-1989).

\(^{12}\) However, the main reproach towards the television of this period is that of populism.

\(^{13}\) In 1995, more than 160 television stations – mostly locally broadcasting channels - were operational all over the country.
The opening of television to the private sector did not modify the role of broadcasters in production. Public channels still broadcast their own productions, whilst the two main private televisions, Mega Channel and Antenna TV, controlled directly or indirectly, via satellite companies, the major part of all domestic drama production. In this context, personal relations continued to play a major role in the organisation of the production sector, in the absence of any legislative regulatory frame of the latter. The liberalisation of television may have freed production from political control, but it was not accompanied by an effective opening towards real competitive liberal procedures. Moreover, the lack of specialisation constituted another major drawback in television production, which affected not only the quality of the final output, but also the structure and the organisation of the market.

The deregulation of Greek television marked an indubitable turn over in the history of domestic drama as well, both in terms of quantity as well as in terms of genre production. The soaring of the global fiction output during the years 1990-4 (from approximately 32 hours up to 58 hours per week, on all stations), showed the channels’ positive policy towards this type of program. Screened firstly at prime-time, the latter was often recycled over the morning or afternoon slots. Liberated from the State guardianship and power, television production submitted to the laws of the market and the maximisation of profit became its main objective. Within this frame, any insinuation of political character on behalf of the creators or the broadcasters had to be avoided, since it would predetermine the viewers concerned and would thus limit the audience ratings.

The result of this evolution became apparent by the return to an entertainment and “light-theme” fiction. The expansion of comedies, henceforth termed as “sitcoms” (abbreviation of the American “situation comedies”) was one of the major features of this period. Popular productions of low cost (three to four million drachmas per episode for the period 1991-2, six to eight millions for 1996-7), shot indoors with three or four cameras and a regular casting in two or three days, sitcoms constituted the ideal program for the prime-time, complying with the mercantile spirit of the private television which wishes to attract the maximal audience by investing the minimum amount of money. They were always intended for a weekly broadcast, usually just after the 20.15h or 20.30h news-round, covering thus the 21.00h to 22.00h timeslot. Structured on 13 or 14 episodes lasting 20 to 26 minutes, they usually ended up being extended over several TV seasons. The return to adventure and crime drama was another distinctive feature of this period. Despite their higher cost (four to six million drachmas per episode for the period 1991-2, 14 to 18 millions for 1996-7) and their more carefully prepared production, compared to sitcoms, these programs were still marked by the penury of “rich” action scenes and the dominance of indoor shootings and dialogues. They were composed of a variable number of episodes lasting approximately 45 minutes and were mostly screened late at night (usually after 22.00h or 23.00h) on a weekly basis. Finally, the development of a new genre, the soap opera, marked the transition to the private television, since it was the latter that introduced the term in the Greek television landscape (pronounced “sapounopera” in Greek) and established its rules. The first Greek soap operas in the beginning of the 90s had the form of dramatic serials, made of 30 to 60 minute episodes and were programmed after 22.00h on a weekly basis. From 1992 up until today, however, the

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14 Since 1994, however, the financial problems that private Greek television encountered have diminished its production pace. Greek fictions have often been replaced by lower cost programs (talk shows, reality shows, etc.) and the quantity of re-screenings increased, the production output remained, however, relatively high.  
15 On a 24h/24h broadcasting basis. It has to be stressed, however, that this increase of global fiction output becomes much less important when examined on the basis of the total broadcasting time which also increased considerably due to the multiplication of the number of channels.  
16 All financial figures emanate from interviews with professionals of Greek television, as well as from unpublished documentation. During the 90s, one US dollar equaled approximately 250-300 drachmas.  
17 Greek prime-time usually covers the 20.00-23.00h timeslot (Koukoutsaki, 2001: 118-123).
broadcasting of *Brightness* ("I lampsi" in Greek), the longest and most popular Greek soap opera, broadcast on the private owned station Antenna TV, established new norms. Thus, the Greek soap operas took the form of low budget productions (approximately two and a half million drachmas per episode for the 1992-3 period), structured on daily episodes lasting approximately 20 minutes. They were mostly screened in the evening, before the 20.15h or 20.30h news-round, contrary to the American formula, according to which soaps are broadcast in the morning or in the afternoon slots ("day-time" soaps), or late at night ("night-time" soaps).

Within the new television landscape of the 90s, the standardisation of production is one of the main drawbacks of fiction programs characterised by the degradation of the language employed, the abundance of scenes of violence and sex, as well as their “poor” content, in general.

The aforementioned *Brightness* ("I lampsi") is a particularly interesting case often cited as one of the most representative examples of Greek television drama in the 90s. This soap, as its title implies, depicts a modern and wealthy Athenian family whose members, despite their high social rank and their exaggerated wealth, lead a life full of unhappiness, bad luck and tragedy. The inner structure of the scenario follows the American formula according to which there are always three story-poles that are simultaneously developed throughout each episode. In terms of content, however, the melodrama is at the heart of the story. Characters are schematic and stereotyped. They are individuals out of common, powerful professionals, terrible criminals or poor and honest servants, having original names and evolving in an impressively luxurious and non-realistic context, striking for economic and/or political power, social justice or love. Despite the exaggerated wealth and glamour put forward in the program, an accumulation of stereotyped and sensational stories leads the general plot: kidnappings, accidents, death illnesses, government scandals, losses of memory, acts of terrorism, spying, adultery, rapes, children/brothers/sisters/parents lost and found again after several years, drugs, alcoholism, AIDS, etc. In any case, characters are always tortured by an unsolved problem and this becomes apparent even in their attitude: they constantly drink and smoke. The screenplay is mostly inspired by the daily sensational tabloids and an effort to install a critical discourse of social content is obvious. However, social critic remains caricatured, a simple means of mannerism, as it takes place in a non-realistic context. Dialogues employ a hyperbolic, pompous language, linked to the paroxysms of the scenario (Koukoutsaki, 2001: 238-244). According to recent studies, *Brightness* follows the “dynastic” soap opera model, a conservative and patriarchal form in terms of power structure, family and gender relations, which “focuses on one powerful family, with some satellite outsiders – connected by romance, marriage or rivalry – on its periphery […] The godfather family of the Greek and Italian variants represent cultural variations on the Mafia-chief story, turned into a television series. These families fill the whole screen, have enough power to organise the world around them (by bribery, extortion, etc.), and economic power is translated into political power. They provide an escape to the world in which crooks may be admired in spite of their immoral actions because they are successful, or because the blame falls on the corrupt society in which the only way to succeed is to have the backing of a Mafia-style family […] Godfather or patriarchal soaps take for granted an unshakeable class structure in which the glamorous […] is the only one worth looking at, both for escaping into a dream world and, at the same time, for ‘proving’ that the rich and powerful are unhappy” (Liebes and Livingstone, 1998: 153, 161, 163). Since its first screening in 1992, the astonishing success of *Brightness* has given birth to several soap operas of the same style, though none of them have managed to compete with its audience ratings.

Delving into the causes of this evolution has revealed a variety of opinions shared partially or unanimously among Greek television professionals. Financial constraints and a lack of
originality in finding scenarios are two of the parameters often mentioned as grounds of “low quality”. The limits imposed by the nature of the medium of television itself is a third one. Finally, there seems to be a widespread assumption among certain professionals that the degradation of television content is “consciously intended”, as a means of “hypnosis” and “alienation” towards society, aimed at the establishment of today's materialistic and consumer oriented lifestyle. According to the defenders of this position, television is a means of economic but also ideological domination. Even though it gives the illusion of modernisation and freedom, it traps societies by creating simulations of reality, in order to keep humans from becoming aware of their “distressing condition”. By projecting the brilliance of the western civilisation, image perfectly coherent with the global expansion of the powerful post-industrial countries, it promotes an affirmative culture founded on the concept of pleasure and the promise of happiness, in order to proclaim a materialistic democracy based on consumption. Within this frame, according to the defenders of this position, advertising becomes the heart of the broadcast strategy: its production quality often outweighs that of the other programs which are, in reality, only the means, the vehicle, that carries the advertising message. The essential element of this mercantile spirit is sensationalism. It comes as no surprise therefore that the expansion of private television in Greece coincided with the blossom of the press tabloids.

Disconnected from this rather pessimist approach, the new generation of professionals tend to develop a Tocqueville-style discourse, based on a more positive, open and managerial apprehension of reality. Without denying the existence of domination mechanisms, they underlay the possibility of maintaining a certain autonomy between television’s mercantile objectives and society’s needs. As far as the entertainment model is concerned, they seem to believe that the latter will soon reach its limits.

This discourse about television as a medium of ideological manipulation is not recent. Greek television professionals’ preoccupations echo several studies in Western Europe that have explored communication “intentionalism” in media since the 70s (Mattelart, 1977). It has often been argued that the notion of manipulation implies the existence of a causal model which is considered to be too simplistic, because it mechanically links the characteristics and the contents of messages to a transformation of their social and cultural context. Even though this link may exist, modern television programs are not only a cause but also a result of social and cultural changes. In other words, it seems that, in reality, television content reflects society as it is acting upon it (Breton and Proulx, 1989: 154-159). As Stavros Kastoras has put it: “At each stage of the history of Greek television, there is a general social, political, aesthetic, etc. frame. Television’s key-personalities carry unconsciously the values of this frame. They are aware of their context’s philosophy and they automatically adapt themselves to it. Their role goes beyond that of simple individuals; they become representatives of a system. With the exception probably of totalitarian regimes, explicit orders are not necessary to reproduce the system. Every modification of the latter brings inevitably a modification in the spirit of television production” (Kastoras, 1998).

Within this scope, the ideological hallmarks of modern Greek television drama should be apprehended as the result of its producers/broadcasters mercantile policy, reflecting society's ideological orientations and cultural homogenisation. However, admitting that Greek television mirrors Greek society is one thing – and what this statement unfortunately implies needs to be analysed\(^\text{18}\) – but refusing television’s responsibility towards Greek society is another. If television content reflects the social and cultural setting of its production, its role

\(^{18}\) It is interesting to mention here that, contrary to the widespread assumption that soap operas are spreading throughout Europe, it has been found that most European countries have produced few programs of this type; moreover, countries such as France and Italy haven't produced any soap operas at all (Liebes and Livingstone, 1998: 148).
goes beyond that of a simple “mapping” of the real world; it also reproduces meanings, values and ideologies. By doing so, and irrespective of any aesthetic or artistic judgement, television participates in the expansion of the materialistic and consumer-oriented lifestyle that seems to dominate contemporary Greece (Koukoutsaki, 2002a). If theorists like Stuart Hall have demonstrated since the 70s the importance of the process of decoding and that of the use of media discourse, do viewers of contemporary Greek television have options for alternative interpretations and uses of the contents transmitted? If yes, what are the limits of these options? Conducting audience analysis might be a way to answer these questions.

**Concluding remarks**

The fact that television stations have always been in charge of production has played a decisive role in the development of Greek television drama. Since its very first steps, the latter has been destined to function as an ideological medium of state propaganda, reproducing the discourse of its government-controlled broadcasters. Within this context, Greek television drama wasn't able to elaborate into an autonomous language of expression nor was it able to develop into a real cultural industry. Crafted methods were the consequence of production's strong politicisation and concentration, along with the lack of coherent long term strategy and specialisation. The deregulation of Greek television didn't modify the situation; production remained a strongly concentrated sector, dependant on its broadcasters' short term commercial interests.

This element is of vital significance as it sheds light on Greece's specificity regarding today's entertainment television model. More specifically, it has already been argued (Olivesi, 1998: 171-207) that in most European television systems, the expansion of the entertainment model in the 80s came as the natural result of a gradual evolution that was guided by the necessity to rationalise production and open it to international – mostly American – competition (Reichenbach, 1990:15). In Greece, however, this evolution didn't take place. Television was founded from its very beginning on the basis of an entertainment model, as a result of the ideological project of the military Dictatorship. Until the end of the 80s, the evolution of Greek television was marked by the gradual elimination of commercial enterpriseing and the affirmation of the political, social and cultural role of television. Consequently, the emergence of the entertainment model of the 90s is not the last stage of a long and gradual process of evolution. On the contrary, it is the result of a combination of factors that are irrelevant to television production. These factors need to be associated to the political turbulence that took place in Greece at the end of the 80s, the latter being incorporated in the context of the general European television deregulation.

The similarities between the dictatorial television of the 70s and the private television of the 90s are flagrant, both in terms of quantity as well as in terms of genre diversification, especially when it comes to programs like fiction: both of them have sustained domestic television drama production and have given it a central place in their daily schedules; both of them have promoted “light-theme” and entertaining fictions that fitted their short-term projects. Their differences reside, however, in the underlying logic that was inherent to these projects. In the dictatorial television, the ideological project was the reason for its entertainment model, whereas in today’s private television, the former constitutes the natural consequence of the latter.

What can we expect from television today? Unfortunately, the perspective of different or alternative contents seems out of reach. The market laws and the research of immediate profit prohibit any initiative or experimentation. Private television’s mercantile model, underlain by the social economic and political power of its entrepreneurs, barons of the press and the public works, dominates the market, domination that no government takes the risk to face. If
the professionals of Greek television are not responsible for its quality, most of them don’t dare oppose to it, since this would threaten their own place within the system. Interestingly enough, among those who condemn contemporary television, certain ones do not hesitate, when the opportunity is given to them, to reproduce the same models. Arguing that television mechanically mirrors society’s orientations is, in our opinion, only part of the truth. If programs like fictions indicate the “agenda of concerns, values and metanarratives […] of the society which produces and views them” (Liebes and Livingstone, 1998: 155), they also shape our apprehension of reality by creating images and meanings that validate or not our vision of the world. Media texts act upon realities as much as they reflect them. Within this scope, Greek television channels have a more important responsibility towards society than what we (or they) would like to think.

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The whole PhD research, in French, entitled Industries culturelles et spécificités nationales: les tendances de production de la fiction télévisuelle grecque (1970-1997), was published in March 2001 by Septentrion Editions (France).

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